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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [RS](#)  
SUBJECT: TFGG01: PARLIAMENT UNANIMOUSLY ENDORSES ABKHAZ,  
SOUTH OSSETIAN INDEPENDENCE

REF: A. A) MOSCOW 2535  
[B. B\) MOSCOW 2491](#)

Classified By: Minister Counselor for Political Affairs Alice G. Wells;  
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: In a solid show of support, both the Federation Council and the Duma voted unanimously to urge that President Medvedev recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states. Parliamentarians blasted Georgia for having launched a military campaign against South Ossetia, and pointed the finger at the U.S. as having planted the seeds for the aggression by arming and training the Georgian military. Having ratcheted up expectations of imminent Russian action, some observers now believe Medvedev and Putin will wait to see if the international community meets Russia's demands: UN confirmation of Russia's peacekeeping role and condemnation of Saakashvili. Medvedev can be expected to proceed cautiously, taking advantage of a situation that, at the moment, he perceives to be in Russia's favor. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) The Federation Council, meeting August 25, unanimously approved an appeal to President Medvedev that he immediately recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In a remarkably organized and disciplined one-hour session, Council leaders and 45 members quickly delivered statements pillorying Georgia for having attacked Tskhinvali August 7. Abkhaz and South Ossetian leaders Bagapsh and Kokoity also addressed the session, proclaiming the support of residents of those territories for independence from Georgia. The Abkhaz leader also confirmed his readiness to sign an agreement on military cooperation with Russia.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Following smartly on the heels of that session, the Duma convened to consider a similar appeal to Medvedev. In that larger body, popularly elected legislators took their time to score rhetorical points. The resolution calling for recognition was introduced by CIS Committee Chairman Ostrovskiy. International relations Committee Chairman Kosachev introduced a companion appeal to the UN and to parliaments of UN member states urging them also to recognize the two entities. Once again, Bagapsh and Kokoity led off discussion of the appeal, charging that steps by "western states" to arm Georgia emboldened leaders in Tbilisi to launch its attack against South Ossetia.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Speeches by Duma party faction leaders took on a very anti-Georgian and anti-American tone. Communist leader Zyuganov and LDPR leader Zhirinovskiy specifically accused the U.S. of having precipitated the attack on South Ossetia by arming and training Georgian military forces, and that U.S. motives included destabilizing Russia and controlling energy transit routes from the Caucasus and the Caspian regions. Vice President Cheney was accused of coordinating the anti-Russian, pro-Georgian campaign. Zhirinovskiy alleged that Israel had intended to attack Iran just prior to the U.S. elections, and that the Georgian military strike now disrupted that plan. In the end, the lower house also adopted the appeals to Medvedev (for Russian recognition) and to the UN and UN member states unanimously.

Not So Fast  
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[1](#)5. (C) In the days just prior to the special session of Parliament, experts and academicians filled newspapers and airwaves with concern for the political consequences of recognition. While conceding that public sentiment has been affected by the events in South Ossetia, esteemed figures including former Ambassadors Adamishin and Lukin urged Medvedev to hold off on recognition. They argued that Moscow's diplomatic hand has been strengthened as a result of "Georgian aggression" and Russia's decisive victory in the war, and that now was not the time to consign the two entities to the same fate as Northern Cyprus, i.e. to being recognized by only one other country.

Now What?  
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[1](#)6. (C) There was little doubt that the legislative moves were coordinated by the Kremlin. The question remains, though, for what purpose? XXXXXXXXXXXX that the same Duma that had said nothing during the war, and had also not been called back earlier from its August recess, was now being used by the Kremlin to further muddy international waters and to give the Kremlin another card to play with European mediators. The Federation Council and Duma were already on

record (as of March, 2008) as supporting independence for Abkhazia and South Ossetia. By orchestrating a solid show of support for independence from the parliament, she contended, the Kremlin can take a tougher line with respect to drawing back Russian forces to pre-August 7 lines of demarcation. Expecting that disputes over interpretation and implementation of Point 6 of the Medvedev-Sarkozy cease-fire agreement will continue with Europe and the U.S., the Kremlin can now either move to recognize, declaring that it cannot

stand in the way of strong public sentiment, or it can argue for acceptance of its interpretation of Point 6. In either case, Medvedev will be able to demonstrate to the world and to the Russian public that, having weathered the storm of world criticism, he took quick action before opportunities created by military action faded away. XXXXXXXXXXXX suggested that factors that might restrain Medvedev from immediately recognizing included positive signals from Europe, and a desire to await the outcome of U.S. presidential elections. Even if he chooses to wait, the parliamentary show will still give Russian diplomats enough cover to take tough positions on the future of Abkhazia and South Ossetia at the OSCE and the UN for months to come.

17. (C) XXXXXXXXXXXX did not anticipate Medvedev approving recognition in the immediate term. Acknowledging that supporting independence was not in Russia's objective interests, XXXXXXXXXXXX said Medvedev's decision would be driven by other factors. Medvedev, he argued, would use the vote to build pressure for an international mechanism that met Russia's bottom line. In particular, he argued that Russia sought a UNSCR confirming its status as peacekeeper in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and expected the international community to halt its unqualified support for President Saakashvili. Otherwise, he intimated, recognition of the two entities might be expedited. He cited an interview given by Saakashvili in recent days in which the Georgian leader reportedly declared that he would strive not to convince South Ossetians to "come back to Georgia," but that "Georgia would come to them (e.g., militarily)." XXXXXXXXXXXX charged that this only further confirmed Saakashvili's future military intentions against South Ossetia and the need to ensure that the Georgian military never launches a military attack against the region again.

18. (C) Comment: The Duma and Federation Council's actions will be used by the Kremlin and the MFA in dealings with foreign intermediaries to demonstrate strong broad support for even tougher measures regarding the two regions, and to further ratchet up pressure against the Saakashvili government. Despite the unanimous votes, Medvedev and Putin can play the recognition game out further, increasing pressure on European allies to compromise on a Russian-preferred UNSC draft resolution while avoiding a step that - XXXXXXXXXXXX's bravado aside - could have unpredictable consequences in Russian domestic terms.

BEYRLE